DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 014 CG 025 362

AUTHOR Symons, Douglas K.
TITLE Maternal Separation Anxiety as a Determinant of Role Satisfaction.
PUB DATE Aug 93
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (101st, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 20-24, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attachment Behavior; Employed Parents; Employed Women; Employee Attitudes; Family Attitudes; Foreign Countries; *Mother Attitudes; Mothers; *Role Conflict; Role Perception; *Separation Anxiety

ABSTRACT

One of the dramatic changes in the North American family over the past 25 years has been the increase in women with young children working outside the home. This paper addresses cognitive factors related to maternal employment during the transitions to parenthood, factors related to different post-partum occupational profiles and the degree to which these factors predict a woman's satisfaction in her occupational/family roles when her children are two years of age. Studies have shown that elements of maternal separation anxiety influence employment decisions in the post-partum period. The researchers focused on the predictive value of maternal separation anxiety on role satisfaction two years later. Results indicate that Concerns About Separation Effects on the Child accounted for 36% of the variance of role satisfaction two years later. Trait anxiety did not moderate this effect. Women who are concerned about being away from their children, or worried over the alternative care their children will receive, end up less happy with their roles. Parity, marital status, prepartum employment status, postpartum employment status, and maternal age all had no apparent impact on the relation between these two variables. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 014

Maternal separation anxiety as a determinant of role satisfaction

Dr. Douglas K. Symons

Acadia University

Infant and Family Research Centre, Psychology Department

Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada B0P 1X0

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Symons

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

This paper was presented as part of a symposium "Cognitive factors in adjusting to the transition to parenthood" (Chair, Dr. Mark Pancer), Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto Ontario Canada, August 1993. This research was supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC 482-90-00034 and 410-93-0929).

CG025362

Maternal separation anxiety as a determinant of role satisfaction

One of the dramatic changes in family structure over the past 25 years or so in North America has been the increase in women working outside the home with young children. What I would like to do during my talk is focus on cognitive factors related to maternal employment during the transitions to parenthood, factors related to different post-partum occupational profiles, and the degree to which these factors predict how satisfied a woman is in her occupational/family roles when children are two years of age.

Employment rates in the post-partum have roughly doubled in the past 20 years or so **(SLIDE: LABOUR RATES)**. For example, this slide of data from Statistics Canada (Dumas & Lavioe, 1992) shows the employment rates of Canadian women in 1976 and 1991, broken down by the age of their youngest child. Note that the rates of women with children under the age of three, represented by the diagonal shading, has doubled over this time frame, from 32% in 1976 to 61% in 1991. The increase between these years has been reasonably linear, and very similar data are available for American samples from the Department of Labour. These trends mean that more women than ever are balancing work outside the home and family roles, and there have been corresponding increases in attention paid to women's role satisfaction and its impact on maternal adjustment, child outcomes, and family functioning.

(SLIDE: LARSON'S WITCH) One of the potential stressors associated with maternal employment is the physical separation of the mother and infant -- mothers are likely concerned about the care their infant will receive when they are apart, reflected in an exaggerated fashion by this cartoon. At a theoretical level, Bowlby (1969) described how within attachment processes, proximity-seeking between mothers and infants was a goal

shared equally between partners and was not the sole responsibility of infants. Researchers are used to studying infant distress patterns during separation-reunion sequences, and they are also aware that there is variability in the degree to which a mother is distressed upon separation. At a social level, there are cultural expectations and guidelines that influence attitudes towards how acceptable separation experiences are, and these ultimately may guide labour force behavior of women in the post-partum. The emphasis on traditional societal norms directs attention to mothers and away from fathers, and it is likely that the separation experience for fathers is very different, although this may be changing with recent proliferation of fathers as primary caregivers. Fathers are important, but I will not be focusing on them.

(SLIDE: MSA CONSTRUCT) Ellen Hock (Hock, McBride, & Gnezda, 1989) has developed the construct of maternal separation anxiety to reflect the separation experience from a maternal perspective, which is believed to be some combination of personality, intrinsic, and social factors. A series of studies has shown that elements of maternal separation anxiety impact employment decisions in the post-partum. Peter McLeod and myself have conducted similar research on maternal employment decisions as a function of maternal separation anxiety in the post-partum period in a rural Canadian sample (Symons & McLeod, in press-a, in press-b). We assigned women to groups based upon their plan reported at birth to be employed or not at six months of age as well as their eventual employment status. **(SLIDE: SAMPLE DESCRIPTORS)** Our study sample of 187 women was broken into four groups that did not differ in these descriptive statistics. You can see on this slide that parents were typically married and Caucasian, with a wide-range of SES scores.

(SLIDE: MSAS SCALE) The primary maternal characteristics that distinguished

employment plans and outcomes were aspects of maternal separation anxiety. The maternal separation anxiety scale has three subscales shown in this slide. The subscales tap into generalized separation anxiety, concerns about the effects of separation on the child, and employment-related concerns, and the scale has good psychometric properties. Sample items are shown as well. **(SLIDE: ERC DATA)** The four groups were based on plans to be home or outside the home in paid employment as well as the actual outcome. The four groups did not differ in a number of personality characteristics from the PRF-E and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. However, this slide shows that women who planned to and did remain home had higher employment-related separation concerns across ages than women who planned to remain home but worked outside the home, as well as women who planned to and did work outside the home. These effects are independent of potential confounds including sex of child, parity, hours of work, marital status, and maternal age.

Aspects of maternal separation anxiety reported at birth can predict post-partum employment profiles, but we are also interested in longer-term prediction of role satisfaction, independent of employment status. According to Crockenberg's (1988) descriptions, role satisfaction is related to whether a woman has freely chosen to work/ remain home or has been forced into one option or the other by external cultural, economic, family, or professional forces. High role-related stress and poor emotional adjustment may be negatively related to sensitive parenting skills, maternal competence, and reports of how "easy" an infant is to care for (see Belsky, 1984; Teti & Gelfand, 1991, 1992), which in turn may affect attachment security (McBride & Belsky, 1988; Wille, 1992). Role satisfaction may therefore have a direct or indirect effect on infant attachment (e.g., Crockenberg, 1981). This kind of research is representative of data suggesting that dissatisfaction with employment

status is linked to child behavior problems through its negative impact on the mother-child relationship. Recent studies suggest that a woman's parenting skills and her own emotional adjustment are more a function of her role satisfaction and commitment than of her employment status (e.g., Barling, 1990; Barling, Fullagar, & Marchl-Dingle, 1988; Crockenberg & Litman, 1991; Greenberger & Goldberg, 1989).

Ultimately these are the issues we wish to address with our followup data of 30 of our infants that have reached two years of age. For the purposes of this presentation, I want to focus on the ability of maternal separation anxiety to predict role satisfaction two years later. The measure of role satisfaction was taken from an interview by Crockenberg & Litman (1991). Our principal analysis was a regression where the three separation anxiety subscales and a measure of trait anxiety, all reported at birth, were used as predictors of role satisfaction when the child was two years of age. (**SLIDE: SEC and ERC**) The results show that Concerns About Separation Effects on the Child accounted for 36% of the variance of role satisfaction reported two years later. This is a fairly straightforward finding, a result of a negative correlation of .61 between SEC at birth and RS at two years. Trait anxiety did not moderate this effect, so it was not the case that generally anxious people were worried about their children at birth and also less happy about their roles at two years. It seems important that women who are concerned about being away from their children or alternative care their children will receive when they are separated from them end up less happy with their roles. More complex modelling could not be attempted because of the number of subjects, so instead, this correlation was investigated for the sample broken down by a number of variables. Parity, marital status, prepartum employment status, postpartum employment status, maternal age, and SES all had no apparent impact on the relation between

these two variables. I should note, however, that we are dealing with a sample of intact families in the followup, perhaps because of differential attrition based on family stability. Because the separation anxiety measure was reported within days of birth, it is hard to argue that the infant has had much impact on the measure. The measure is unrelated to temperament measures taken at 3 and 6 months. In this respect, the measure reflects expectations the mother has about the future behavior of the infant.

Where this relatively straightforward relationship becomes critical, however, is when expectations predict future behavior and relationships. The power of cognitive representational models of past or current relationships to predict future relationships, for example, are having a dramatic impact on research using attachment theory on children and adults of all ages. Ultimately, the impact of features of maternal separation anxiety may be upon future emotional adjustment of the parent and relationships parents have with children. (**COMPLEX MODEL**[1]) For example, in this tentative pattern of intercorrelations that in no way should be construed as a path analysis or causal modelling, women who expressed more concerns about separation from their infants at birth reported lower role satisfaction and more stress within their marriages at two years. Depressive symptoms, in turn, were related to attachment security using the Waters Q-sort measure (Waters, 1987). Stress within marriage was related to perceived stress within the child domain of parenting, which in turn was negatively related to security of attachment. These patterns suggest that cognitive factors in the form of expectations, concerns, and the like have the potential to predict important outcomes in parental well-being, broadly defined as role satisfaction and emotional adjustment, as well as future relationships, in the form of early patterns of attachment. Maternal employment seems relevant only insofar as it functions as a stressor, mediator of

role satisfaction, and index of other family processes, although this conclusion is tentative at this time (Kline, Cowan, P.A., & Cowan, C.P., 1991).

Fitting this model into the broader picture, researchers are very interested in the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns (**SLIDE: TRANSITION MODEL**). Other mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of of relationship styles in the form of cognitive models of relationship styles also may be operative by way of expectations. All of this makes transition to parenthood a very important period for understanding adult adjustment and child outcomes.

References

Abidin, R.R. (1990). Parenting Stress Index, 3rd Edition. Pediatric Psychology Press.

Barling, J. (1990). Employment, stress, and family functioning. Toronto: John Wiley & Sons.

Barling, J., Fullagar, C., & Marchl-Dingle, J. (1988). Employment commitment as a moderator of the maternal employment status/ child behavior relationship. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 9, 113-122.

Belsky, J. (1984). The determinants of parenting. Child Development, 55, 83-96.

Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment. London: Hogarth.

Caruso, G.L. (1992). Patterns of maternal employment and child care for a sample of two-year-olds. Journal of Family Issues, 13, 297-311.

Crockenberg, S.B. (1981). Infant irritability, mother responsiveness, and social influences on the security of infant-mother attachment. Child Development, 52, 857-865.

Crockenberg, S.B. (1988). Stress and role satisfaction experienced by employed and nonemployed mothers with young children. Lifestyles: Family and Economic Issues, 9, 97-110.

Crockenberg, S., & Litman, C. (1991). Effects of maternal employment on maternal and two-year-old child behavior. Child Development, 62, 930-953.

Dumas, J., & Lavoie, Y. (1992). Report on the demographic situation in Canada 1992: Current demographic analysis. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Minister of Science, Industry, and Technology.

Greenberger, E., & Goldberg, W. A. (1989). Work, parenting, and the socialization of children. Developmental Psychology, 25, 22-35.

Hock, E., McBride, S., & Gnezda, T. (1989). Maternal separation anxiety: Mother-infant separation from the maternal perspective. Child Development, 60, 793-802.

Kline, M., Cowan, P.A., & Cowan, C.P. (1991). The origins of parenting stress during the transition to parenthood: A new family model. Early Education and Development, 2, 287-305.

McBride, S., & Belsky, J. (1988). Characteristics, determinants, and consequences of maternal separation anxiety. Developmental Psychology, 24, 407-414.

Pederson, D.R., Moran, G., Sitko, C., Campbell, K., Ghesquire, K., & Acton, H. (1990). Maternal sensitivity and security of mother-infant attachment. Child Development, 61, 1974-1983.

Radloff, L. (1977). The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. Applied Psychological Measurement, 1, 385-401.

Symons, D., & McLeod, P. (in press-a). Maternal employment plans and outcomes after the birth of an infant in a Canadian sample. Family Relations.

Symons, D., & McLeod, P. (in press-b). Maternal, infant, and occupational characteristics that predict post-partum employment patterns. Infant Behavior and Development.

Teti, D.M., & Gelfand, D.M. (1991). Behavioral competence among mothers of infants in the first year: The mediational role of self-efficacy. Child Development, 62, 918-929.

Teti, D.M., & Gelfand, D.M. (1992). Maternal self-efficacy and maternal behavioral competence of infants. Paper presented at the biennial International Conference on Infant Studies, Miami Beach, FL.

Volling, B.L., & Belsky, J. (1992). Infant, father, and marital antecedents of infant-father attachment security in dual-earner and single-earner families. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 15, 83-100.

Waters, E. (1987). Attachment Behavior Q-set, Revision 3.0. Unpublished, State University of New York at Stoney Brook.

Wille, D. E. (1992). Maternal employment: Impact on maternal behavior. Family Relations, 41, 273-277.

ENDNOTE

1. Measures for this diagram are as follows:

Subscale 2: Perception of Separation Effects on the Child, Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale, Hock et al., 1989.

Stress due to Role Support, Role Support Subscale, Parental Stress Index, Abidin 1990.

Role Satisfaction, Structured Interviews reported in Crockenberg & Litman, 1991.

Depression, CES-D, Radloff, 1977.

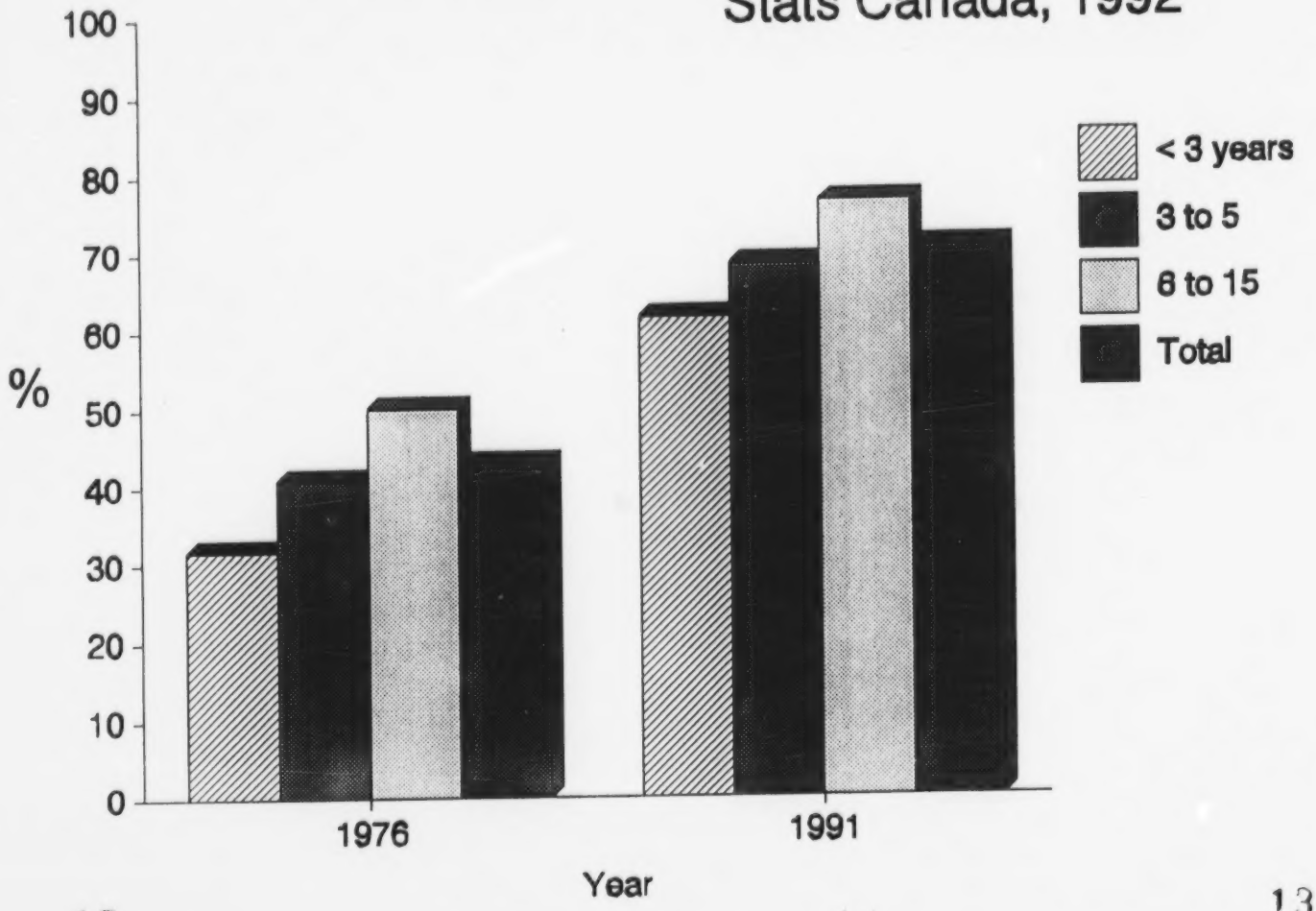
Parental Stress: Child Domain, Parental Stress Infdex, Abidin, 1990.

Security of Attachment, Attachment Behavior Q-set, Waters, 1987.

Maternal Sensitivity, Maternal Behaviour Q-sort, Pederson et al., 1990.

Women's Labour Force Participation

Stats Canada, 1992



"Now let me get this straight . . . We hired you to babysit the kids, and instead you cooked and ate them *both*?"

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Maternal Separation Anxiety, Hock et al. (1989)

Unpleasant emotional state tied to the separation experience, including feelings of worry, sadness, or guilt.

Determined by:

* basic personality structure
* genetically determined biases
* role-related prescriptions from their culture

Study Sample

* 187 women assessed at birth, 3, and 6 months post-partum (from an n=231, 17% attrition)

* Age (years):
  Maternal 27.6 (SD=4.2, Range 19-38)
  Paternal 29.5 (SD=5.0, Range 19-52)

* 84% Married

* 96% Caucasian

* Infants 45% female

* Caesarian section rate 21%

* SES (Blishen score):
  Maternal 42.4 (SD=14.4, range 22-101)
  Paternal 43.3 (SD=16.2, range 22-101)

* 46% of women employed at six months, 33% of those employed part-time

Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale (Hock et al., 1989)

Def'n: Unpleasant emotional state tied to the separation experience, including feelings of worry, sadness, or guilt.

Subscale 1: Maternal Separation Anxiety

Guilt and anxiety resulting from and in anticipation to leaving her child.

"When I am away from my child, I feel lonely and miss him/her a great deal".

"I like to have my child close to me most of the time".

Subscale 2: Separation Effects on Child

Mother's perception of the child's reaction to departure and functioning in her absence.

"Exposure to many different people is good for my child".

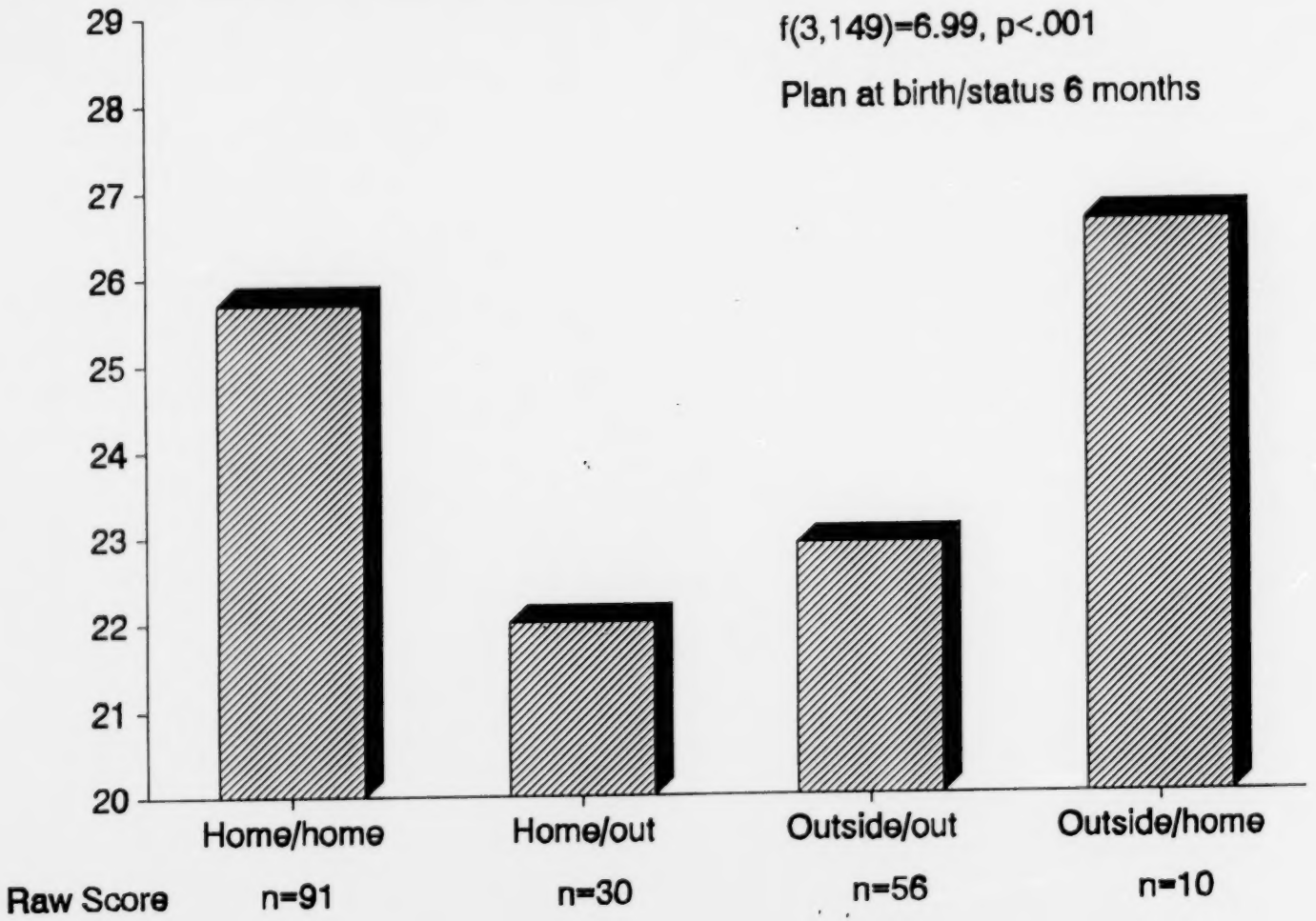
"There are times in the lives of young children when they need to be with people other than mothers".

Subscale 3: Employment-related Separation Concerns

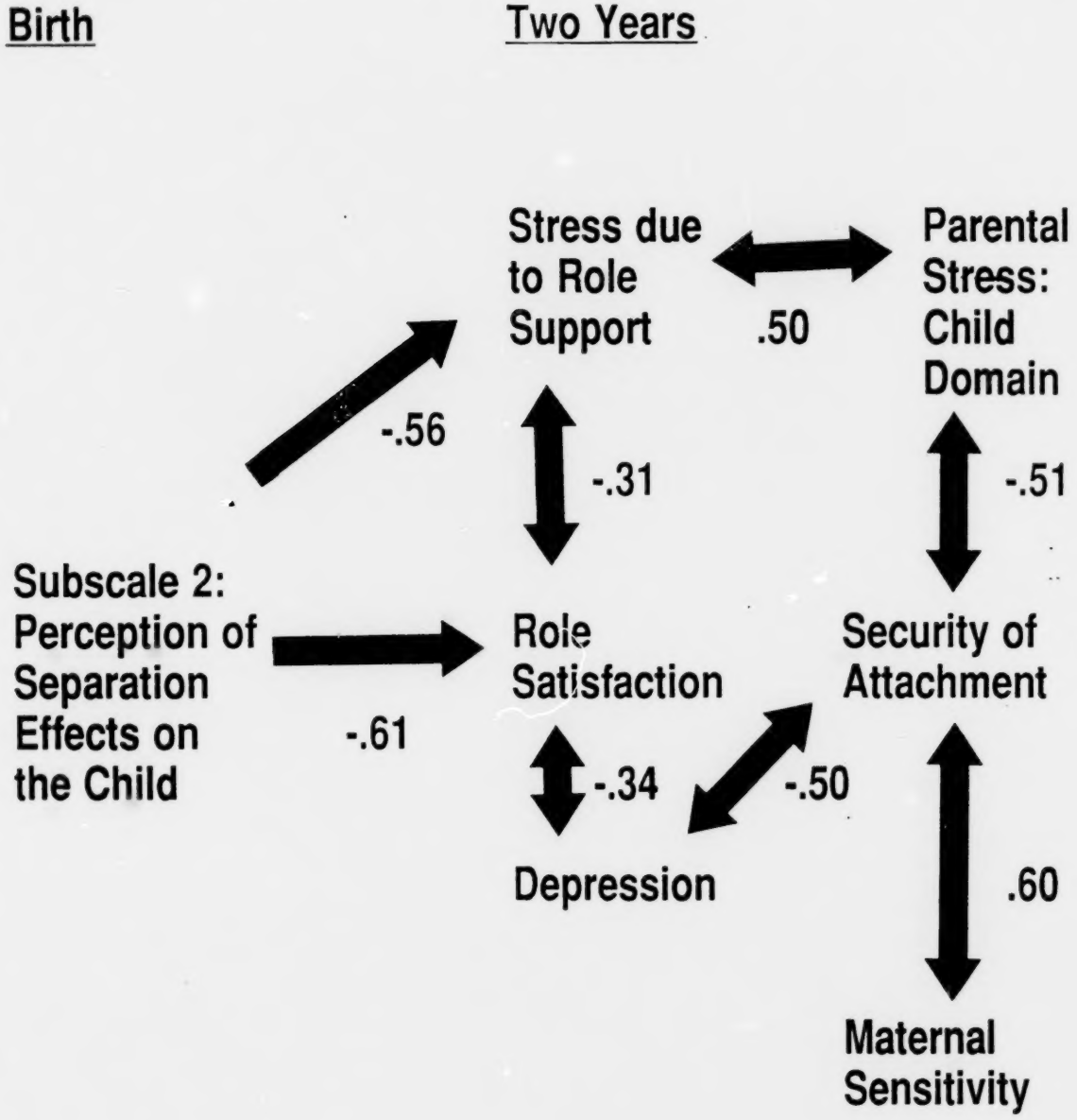
"I would resent my job if it meant I had to be away from my child".

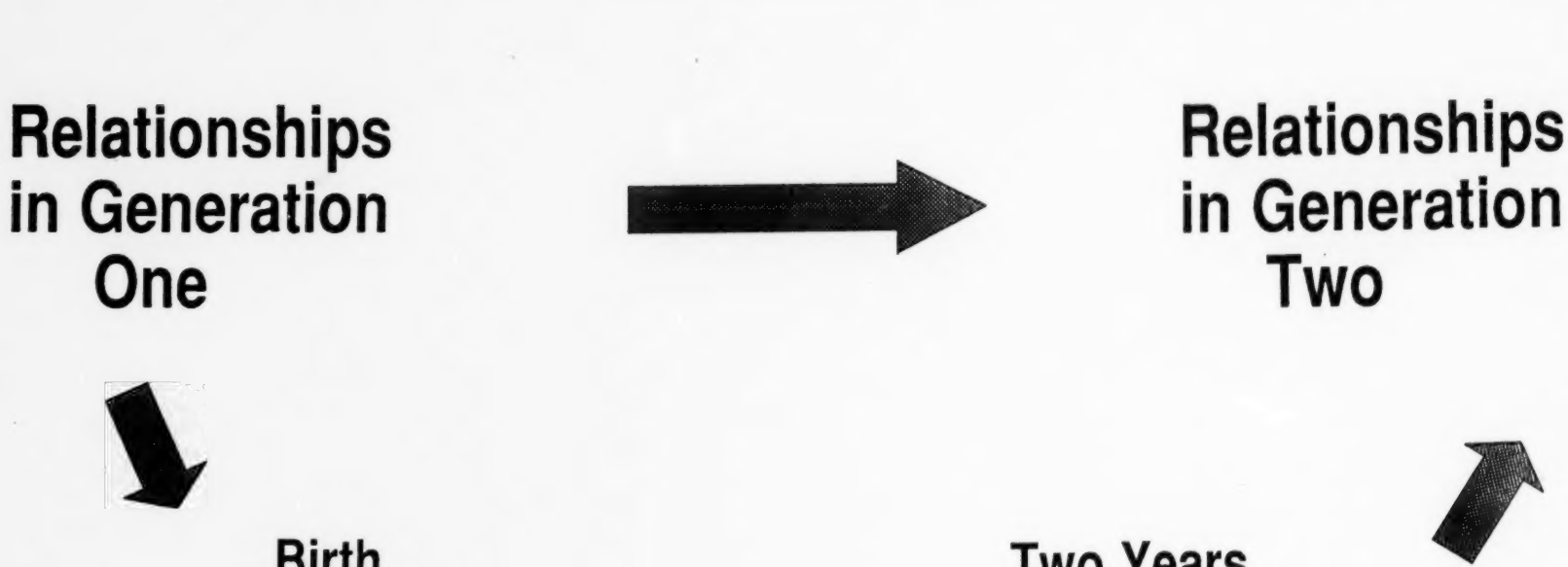
"I would not regret postponing my career in order to stay home with my child".

Employment-related separation concerns



Birth		Two Years
Subscale 2: Perception of Separation Effects on the Child	-.61 →	Role Satisfaction


Birth
Two Years
Stress due to Role Support
Parental Stress: Child Domain
.50
-.56
-.31
-.51
Subscale 2: Perception of Separation Effects on the Child
-.61
Role Satisfaction
Security of Attachment
-.34
-.50
Depression
.60
Maternal Sensitivity


Relationships in Generation One
Relationships in Generation Two
Birth
* Internal Working Models
* Parental Expectations
* Existing Relationship/ Adjustment
Two Years
* New Infant-Parent Relationship
* Infant Characteristics
* Existing Relationship/ Adjustment